



BLM FILE PHOTO

## FIRTH/SNAKE RIVER PROJECT

A PROPOSAL TO PROTECT VALUABLE WILDLIFE HABITAT AND  
PROVIDE PUBLIC RECREATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES ALONG THE  
SNAKE RIVER CORRIDOR



#### THE PROJECT:

A unique opportunity exists to place almost 600 acres of extremely valuable riverine habitat along the Snake River into public ownership - thus preserving its significant natural values in perpetuity.

The property is located on the west side of the Snake River in Bingham County. It is situated two miles south of Firth, between the larger cities of Idaho Falls and Blackfoot. It consists of 577 acres, most of which remains in a natural native cottonwood habitat type.

The property is privately owned by two individuals. The lower portion of the property was zoned for residential development in the early 1970's, and most of the lots in the approved subdivisions were sold. The northern portion of the property lies outside of the approved subdivisions. Fortunately, due to the Teton Flood and access problems, no housing or improved roads have been constructed. Most of the individual lots were purchased from the original owners by the current owners over a period of years. The current owners possess a deeded access to the property.

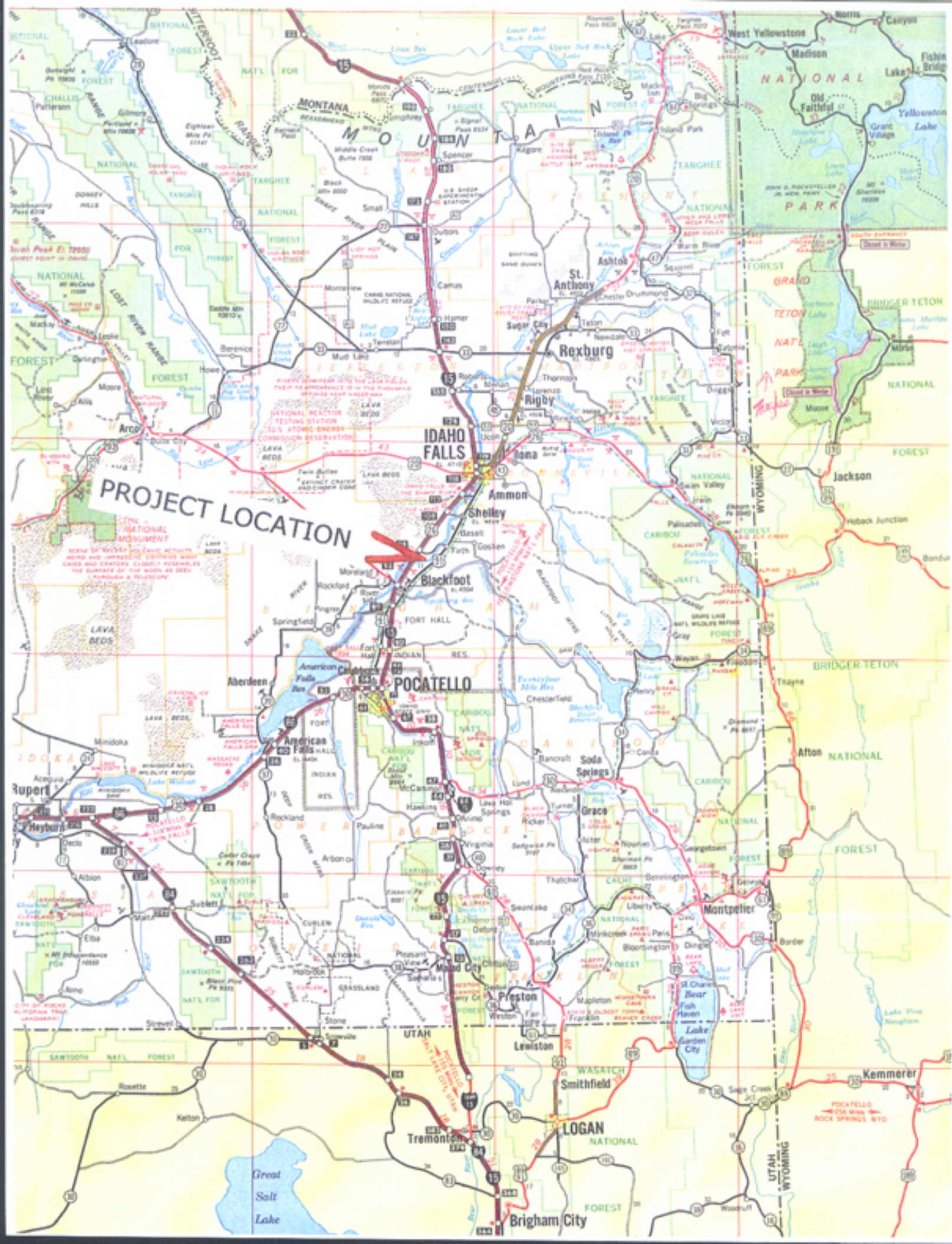
Acquisition of this property would preserve a key island of native cottonwood habitat along a free flowing section of the Snake River. Most of the natural riverine ecosystem in the general area has already been developed, either for residential or agricultural purposes. The very limited natural areas that remain are under heavy threat, especially for upscale residential development. Examples of this type of development can be found both upstream and downstream from the property being proposed for acquisition, and the market for buildable acreage on the river is very active at this point in time.

If subject lands are not placed into public ownership it appears to be only a matter of time before they are developed for residential purposes, and that timeframe is rapidly growing shorter. Acquisition would provide for the preservation of a key block of riparian habitat in an area lacking resource protection and limited public land ownership.

#### WILDLIFE VALUES:

Wildlife values of the property are quite high. Big game, upland game, furbearers, waterfowl, and non-game species are all in residence. Deer and elk are both present. The area is of considerable value to upland game birds and waterfowl, including mallards, Canada geese, blue-winged teal, green-winged teal, widgeon, gadwall, mergansers, goldeneye, wood ducks, wild turkey, pheasants and mourning doves. These species, as well as a host of other mammals, raptors, and non-game birds benefit from existing habitat







conditions. Waterfowl are particularly attracted to the sloughs that traverse the area.

Two Federally listed species, the peregrine falcon and the bald eagle, utilize the area. Bald eagles commonly use the river corridor from November through March. Eagle nesting occurs along this stretch of the Snake with one active nest located near the subject property. Peregrine falcons use the river as a migration route.

#### HABITAT:

Wetland and riparian habitats constitute a high percentage of the land base. The area is dominated by open cottonwood sites interspersed with channels and sloughs. Vegetative community types include cottonwood-shrub forest, sagebrush-grassland, emergent wetlands, and sloughs.

Forested riparian habitats are contiguous with the river for about three miles. The width of the habitat varies from one-quarter to one-half mile. Common species are narrowleaf cottonwood and peachleaf willow, with lower densities of dogwood, boxelder, Russian olive, and Rocky Mountain juniper. Understory and ground cover plants include golden currant, skunkbrush sumac, common chokeberry, Wood's rose, western wheatgrass, foxtail barley, Kentucky bluegrass, and Great Basin wildrye. Cottonwood and sandbar willows are the dominant species on islands and gravel bars. Big sagebrush, green rabbitbrush, western wheatgrass, lupine, globemallow, vetch, buckwheat, goldenrod, and gray rabbitbrush occur in the sagebrush-grassland type. Weedy species include cheatgrass, mullein, Canada thistle, and quackgrass. All of these habitat types are of value to wildlife.

A parcel on the western side of the property, containing approximately 38 acres, has been in agricultural production for several years. It could be easily restored to productive wildlife habitat.

#### RECREATION:

Recreational opportunities would be greatly enhanced with the acquisition of subject property. Potential activities include hunting, fishing, hiking, camping, boating, canoeing, horseback riding, wildlife photography, and observing wildlife. It would provide a wonderful opportunity for the public to experience the aesthetics of a great, free flowing river, the associated wildlife, and the beautiful native cottonwood-shrub habitat. If acquisition



WETLAND HABITAT ON FIRTH/SNAKE RIVER PROJECT  
(BLM FILE PHOTOS)





WEST SIDE OF PROPERTY IN FOREGROUND



MATURE RIVERINE HABITAT ALONG SNAKE RIVER



112°17.000' W

112°16.000' W

112°15.000' W

112°14.000' W

WG584 112°13.000' W

43°18.000' N

43°17.000' N

43°16.000' N

43°18.000' N

43°17.000' N

43°16.000' N

PROJECT FIRTH

RIVER

CORRETT

17

16

16

15

14°

112°16.000' W

112°15.000' W

112°14.000' W

WG584 112°13.000' W

0 1000 METERS 0 500 1000 METERS

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occurs, the public would be able to easily reach the property via vehicles using the extant deeded access as well as directly from the river.

#### OTHER PARTICULARS:

The owners of the 577 acres would much prefer that the property be placed into public ownership as opposed to being developed. They are currently prepared to sell the property, assuming a satisfactory price can be agreed upon, and forego the higher potential gains that might accrue from development.

Ownership of the mineral rights was reserved in the United States when the property was transferred out of Federal ownership.

There is a small Bureau of Reclamation power site withdrawal contiguous to the river near the middle of the property.

There are seven undeveloped lots, totaling about 30 acres, located within the exterior boundary of the proposal. The willingness of the owners to sell is unknown, but consideration should be given to acquiring the lots at some point in time. However, acquisition is not essential to having a manageable area.

In addition, there are another 130 acres of privately owned cottonwood-shrub habitat contiguous to the proposed acquisition. There are two owners involved. Their willingness to sell is unknown. Acquisition of these parcels would round out the area; however, their acquisition is not essential as the 577 acre proposal represents a highly manageable unit in itself.

#### SUMMARY:

If it is not acquired for public purposes, there is no question that the property will soon be developed, most likely for upscale residential purposes.

The time is right to acquire the property! Residential development along this stretch of the Snake is rapidly accelerating. There is very little natural riparian habitat of this size and quality remaining along the river corridor from Idaho Falls to American Falls. Couple these facts with the presence of willing sellers and you have a situation that cries out for immediate action. Lets make it happen!